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*For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.*

TABLE-TALK.

(Continued from Page 252, No. IV.)

**D**R. S. I do agree with you entirely, sir: to ascertain where the abuse originated, if it were practicable, is unnecessary; because I believe it will be allowed, that now if men were seen paying to good sense and conversational talent, in a female, the respect they pay to senseless grinning beauty, a desirable reform would instantly take place. Females would be then led to the study of useful attainments instead of qualifying themselves for the place of stage-dancers, or public performers on musical instruments; the idle industry of fillagree, and all that baublish tribe would cease; and even though useful books should be read for the mere purpose of shining in conversation, it would be the more tolerable abuse; and the person who read, would give a hope of being more accessible to reason, than the poor thoughtless things, who tell you, as a laudable boast, that they hate thinking, of all things. What reasonable hope can men entertain of obtaining partners in the marriage state, who shall be able to discharge the important duties of wife, mother, and mistress, when they discountenance in females the acquisitions necessary to qualify them? What blindness!!

Mr. Aimworth. Well Dr. as a candidate for the honourable state of matrimony, I shall treasure up your advice, the justice of which I fully allow; yet permit me to say, that you seem too severe upon us young folks; the evils you speak of do exist, but perhaps, not to the extent your words seem to imply.

Dr. S. Sir, there are some exceptions, I grant: I have met with some young people, who manifested without ostentation, the riches of a cultivated mind, and who could bear their part in conversation, and reflected credit on their valued parents. Such persons had no need for recourse to the prevalent mode of entertaining a company with drawing anamorphoses of their dearest friends.

This wretched resource of barren ignorance was unknown to them. But, sir, such characters are so rare, as not to affect the general description of society. Rational entertainment is so little known, that should our usual conversations in this family, or even what has passed among us now go abroad faithfully reported, it would not gain credit, and rather be supposed a kind of covert sneer on the actual state of things, as they are to be seen at our fashionable parties. Neither is it among the thoughtless and dissipated that this neglect of an instructive interchange is to be found: it infects even the wise and learned; insomuch that we may boldly pronounce, that ~~few~~ now-a-days, can boast of having received any instruction in conversation, from any learned person of his acquaintance.

Mr. Aimworth. My acquaintance with the world is too limited yet to enable me to determine on your assertion from my own experience: If it be as you say, we form a strange contrast to the ancients; whom we are accustomed to reverence as our masters. We have not, it is true, any remnants of their familiar conversations; but we may infer from the form of dialogue, in which most of their famous treatises on philosophy are delivered, that serious and interesting subjects were discussed in private meetings. In our days, such discussions are so completely unknown, that no person would venture to publish his sentiments on a subject in the form of a supposed conversation, if he aimed at verisimilitude; except in matters of religion, on which people are in general ready enough to dispute. Where we find the most esteemed writers then giving their thoughts in such a form, (as we may be sure they aimed at throwing an appearance of probability over their writings) the just conclusion is, that their writings are in this respect a just picture of manners as they were. How much it were to be wished, that such a picture could be exhibited now; and why might not the effort be made? Surely, if the superior advantages of passing time in rational conversation were strikingly

contrasted with the emptiness, the absurdity, nay the sinfulness of abusing time, as is too generally done; if some person, who possessed the influence conferred by respectability and talent, were to enforce this duty on society, men could not be so blind to their real interest as not at least to make a trial.

Dr. S. Young gentleman, I honour your zeal and taste, and if I could promise myself any advantage from an exertion, such as you urge, I should not be backward to assist; but I am not yet so deranged, as to be qualified for such a Quixotic expedition. You may think, young gentleman, that I am (as one I think with whom you are intimate has it) "*Laudator temporis acti*," but no, I have seen considerable improvement in many respects in this nation; and, in this particular I am so impartial as not to give my unqualified praise to your favourite ancients, on the score of conversation. Their conversational parties wanted their chief ornament, the female. Among the Romans the women were more generously treated than among the Greeks; they had the enjoyment of their liberty, could visit and receive visits when and where they pleased, and were not precluded from the company of the men. Yet an acquaintance with what we term accomplishments, dancing, and singing well, and speaking Greek, the French of those times, exposed a woman to the vilest imputations. Among the Greeks, the females seem degraded into objects for mere sensual indulgence, and prized for beauty or excellence, as one would prize a horse or dog. It was esteemed highly indecent for a female to be visible to any male but her husband, not even to her husband's nearest male relations. If you then propose these people as an example, I move an amendment.

Mr. R. Your expectations, Dr. do not seem very sanguine, nor, I must confess, are mine; but, though we despair of producing any general reform in society, we are not precluded from an endeavour to make the best of our situation. Suppose, then, we should look about us, and see whether each of us now present, be acquainted with one person, if no more, whom we could associate with us, into a kind of weekly meeting. The idea has at

times occupied my mind, and on one of these occasions, fancying I saw the blemishes of fashionable life, I amused myself with the plan of a society, formed on the principle of being *directly opposed* to the fashionable world, in those particulars wherein it is censurable. I even went so far as to draw up a number of resolutions as the basis of its constitution, which, if you have any desire, I shall lay before you.

Mr. A. Sir, I am delighted at the idea. I have gone into company as well inclined to be amused as any one, and people say, *that* is more than half way to finding pleasure; yet, disappointment has almost always met me. I have been dragged into a dispute about politics, or called on to decide a hunting bet, or stuck up amongst a bevy of misses, at questions and commands, or still worse, nailed to a card-table, with some of the unamiable of both sexes. And surely I should be rejoiced at the prospect of being able to enjoy myself once a week.

Mrs. R. Well, Mr. R. you have been secret indeed; did you suppose I inherited so much of my sex's failing, that you would not communicate your ideas to me.

Mr. R. By no means, my dear, but the matter did not seem of sufficient promise to make it worth mentioning; but now that our conversation has taken this unexpected turn, I shall read you what I sketched.

We, the undersigned, having often smarted under the ordinances imposed by the legislators of fashion, and wishing to enjoy occasionally the comforts of instructive conversation, mutual attentions, politeness, modest cloathing and elbow-room, have agreed to the following resolutions, viz.

RESOLVED, That the object of our meetings shall be, primarily to promote as much as possible useful conversation, that we may enjoy some recompense for the sacrifice we make to society at large, in exposing ourselves to pain from fashionable insipidity.

That in furtherance of this, each member shall exert him or herself in exciting profitable research, and in calling forth the talents of each other, most diligently avoiding the fashionable principle of outshining or eclipsing each other.

That the president, shall be empowered, at his own discretion, to call on each member in succession, for a short essay, tale, &c. according as the person called on may think proper.

That no female member be permitted, *on any account*, to appear in a meeting of the society, *fashionably dressed*, under pain of being sent home to *undress*, nor in any other meeting, more than *half-naked*, under pain of being disowned as a member of this society.

That no scandal be permitted in the society, no hints of convenient dropsies, of sudden visits to the country, of ladies appearing unexpectedly thin, &c. penalty (if a female member) silence for the night (If a male member) standing up in his place, and, in the character of a *fashionable*, saying something silly.\*

That the gentlemen shall be polite and attentive to the ladies: no relaxation of this resolution to be permitted, except in compliance with the feelings of occasional visitors, should they express their dislike of such antiquated conduct.

That no member, whether male or female, shall talk nonsense, except as in the preceding case.

That cards, questions and commands, hot-cockles, &c. never be introduced, except, as before excepted.

That the room provided for the meetings of the society be always of such a size, as in a full meeting, will allow each individual space to turn round.

Dr. S. Whatever will tend to correct the *extravagancies* of society, shall have my hearty support; especially, when these extravagancies are the luxuriant exuberances of things laudable in themselves.

Mr. R. As a female, I must acknowledge myself interested in such a plan, especially in that, which I think, the Doctor alludes to in his *extravaganzas*, politeness being lately supposed to consist in that kind of conduct, which contributes to the ease and harmony of intercourse, some have overlooked the *spirit*, and attended to the *letter*, and seeing *ease* mentioned as the object to be attained through

it, have wisely begun *at home*, and made politeness consist in consulting their *own ease*: so that, except with a few young men only just entering in life, and consequently unformed on their notions, or some old gentleman of the old school, a lady has little chance of common attentions. Now, as I do not feel myself to be one of the most robust of the creation, I must confess I should not be sorry, in case of my husband's absence, to be escorted by a gentleman to my carriage, from the theatre on a crowded night, or be protected on some similar occasion.

Mr. A. I hope it will not be necessary for me to declare my hearty concurrence in any measure conducive to the improvement of manners.

After some more conversation on the subject, it was finally agreed that an attempt should be made to collect a few persons qualified to constitute such a society. At the suggestion of Dr. Sowerby it was agreed that *merit alone* should qualify for admission, and to the honour of the others be it recorded, that they immediately assented. After these steps they adjourned the meeting to that day fortnight.

#### EVENING II.

*Present.... Mr. and Mrs. Revel, Dr. Sowerby, Mr. Alimworth. Rev. Mr. Holmby, introduced by Mr. Revel, Mr. Stanhope, by Mr. Alimworth.*

Dr. S. We are but few, I see, yet small as the number is, it exceeds my expectation, as I confess I think it beyond the usual proportion of things, and that we have been able to collect such a number, though small, reflects honour on Mr. and Mrs. Revel, through whose connections, made with discrimination, we have been made known to each other.

Mr. R. Excuse me, Dr. I think myself the honoured person, since my friends, by admitting me to their intimacy, seemed to have thought me possessed of some little merit. We are now competent to form a quorum, and have some to spare. We might, therefore, in consistency with our intention, proceed to organize ourselves, and I would thereto propose, that Dr. Sowerby be chosen perpetual president. His zeal for the interest of society warrants us to expect from him activity

\* This regulation not to bind visitors.

in the office, and his information and understanding will render any code of laws, except what we have already agreed to, unnecessary.

This proposal met with the approbation of all, the Dr. excepted, but his objections were over-ruled; so that henceforth we are to consider the society as regularly formed, with the Dr. at its head.

The Doctor thought that on his appointment to the presidency, it was his duty to deliver his opinion to the society, on the principal objects of their association; he therefore addressed them in a *neat, forcible* speech to the following purport:

"I feel considerable pleasure, my friends, on being called on to address you on an occasion, which I had often fondly wished for, and yet scarcely felt myself authorized to indulge a hope on. We meet, for the purpose of recreating ourselves after the fatigue of supporting a part in society, which cannot but be painful, that of maintaining an intercourse with those we cannot esteem, and in compliance with their wishes, doing what we dislike and must condemn.

"Who, being gifted with but a moderate portion of good sense, can join with any pleasure in the pursuits of the card-table; what man of delicacy will partake in the gross excesses of the bottle; what person of generous feeling can do such violence to themselves, as I will not say, to take pleasure in, but to—suffer calumny and falsehood to be poured forth in an overwhelming torrent on the reputation even of an enemy?"

"And what else are the—so termed *pleasures* of society? Go to party after party; bring the *component parts* to an analysis; after a thousand experiments the result will be the same, a turbulent effervescing bacchanal spirit, corroding acid of slander, and the *caput mortuum* of the card-table.

"What is life to those who have a relish for higher things, but nausea and disgust? Let us think ourselves fortunate, my friends, that we have thus met together, and let us act with a hearty resolve to benefit each other. The follies and vapidness, I would add too, the criminal nature of many of the

*pleasures* of fashionable life, furnish us, in some respects, with a rule, *per antithesin*, whereby to walk. In the particulars I have mentioned, it will be our rule to proceed in direct opposition. We shall admit of no excess in wine, cards shall be utterly excluded, and the person among us found guilty of any slanderous insinuation, shall be sent to keep company with the tale-bearers and calumniators elsewhere. I anticipate your hearty agreement in these sentiments, and I shall not think so meanly of my friends, as to compliment them on it, as I am convinced, that in agreeing hereto they make no sacrifice. We do not come together, casting a look of longing and regret after *those dear pleasures*, cards, scandal and the bottle. We associate rather as those, who rejoice at having found a pleasing retreat, where we may enjoy ourselves at ease from folly and turbulence. So far am I from complimenting on this occasion, I should on the contrary, be much inclined to reprehend you severely, if, when an opportunity of this kind is offered, you should be found clinging rather to that intercourse, from which you can reap neither pleasure nor advantage. You, my friends, have not the apology of ignorance of better things. You cannot say, your minds are void of information, your taste uninformed, your judgment unimproved; on the contrary, I know you possess taste, judgment and good sense. How culpable then, with such qualifications, should you be, if found delighting and participating in the pleasures of those who are destitute of all. To souls, into which the sun of science has never shot a ray, whose only knowledge is the hedging a bet, or arranging trippery, let us leave the congenial delights of cards, scandal, and such appropriate *agremens*, from you I expect, from you I would demand superior things.

"Let us now advert to the purposes for which we meet; the primary one confessedly, the enjoyment of conversation connected with an enquiry into every thing tending to an improvement of it. As invested with the office, which your flattering election has conferred on me, I would propose for the subject of this evening's conference, the

question, what is conversation, what its defects, and what the remedy.

"Were I called on to define it, I should feel myself inclined to describe it by negatives, and I should be less solicitous about giving a *positive* definition, as there are so many present to supply my deficiency."

Mrs. R. Well, sir, please to proceed then.

Dr. S. I would commence by saying, it is not disputing, even to anger and mutual abuse, about religion and politics, nor the disgorging of slanderous ridicule, with full approbation of the hearers, against any person when absent, to whom when present, the slanderer would behave with every appearance of respect and esteem (how base!) nor the monopolizing of all the *talk* (for then it loses the essential attribute of conversation) nor the vapid interchange of trite jests; the second edition of Swift's "*Polite Conversation*;" nor the arrangement of fashions, nor the tales of the nursery.

Mr. R. Have pity Dr. and do not proceed to clear off at such a rate: the fashionable world may congratulate itself, that you are not its legislator, for even if you should proceed no farther in your scheme of limitation, you would condemn to painful silence nine tenths of our people of wit. What would become of all those whose character is so high for selling of bargains, pert replies, costive puns? And then the descriptive eloquence of dress-fanciers! how completely would it be marred? you must, indeed, be more merciful, and in consideration of the utter hopelessness of any improvement in the present generation, leave them to themselves, and direct your thoughts and laws to the rising one.

Rev. Mr. Holmby. While I heartily concur with Dr. Sowerby in so much of his negative definition, as he has been permitted to give, I also agree with my friend Mr. R. that by proscribing such things, we should unpeople routs and drums, as my own experience proves to me the utter aversion from all rational modes of intercourse that seems to pervade society. I have frequently sought to give a turn, where I have been, to the frivolous or malicious chat that was consuming our time: sometimes, I have endeavoured

to introduce some topic, that I thought, would lead to information; then I was nick-named pedant: at other times I have thought it my duty to lead the company to some serious considerations; then I heard myself called, methodist or swaddler. Now I cannot, for my life understand, why some instructive subject might not be introduced, when a number of people is collected; yet the very attempt is treated like *Leze Majesté*, or what is there in a scriptural subject, that should, on solemn occasions, make the discussion of it improper.

Mr. Aimworth. It has been ruled in the courts, that *truth* is no libel, else I should fear that the opinions we have given on this subject, might expose us to the charge of libelling society, and so we should fall under the same imputation of slandering, which we lay on others. By attending to the Dr's. definition we may infer *conversation* to be a mutual interchange of opinions, on subjects interesting and profitable.

Mr. Stanhope. If I understand you aright, I should suppose you particularly mention *profitable and interesting subjects*; for that without them it would dwindle into mere *chat*: I conceive, also, that according to your view, all subjects may be introduced; and that discussion and argument are legitimate parts of it, while you would banish *disputing and argumentation*. Under such restrictions, even the touch-paper subjects of politics and religion might be introduced.

Dr. S. Yes, sir, and with much advantage too, I apprehend. Now from the mere statement of the essentials of conversation, we can ascertain the causes of the great dearth of it amongst us. It is evident, that, as some acquaintance with profitable and interesting subjects, is necessary, very few are qualified, on account of defect of information.

Rev. Mr. H. Yet, Dr. I don't think, even if the possession of information sufficient it were, we should see many, who are confessedly men of learning, shine in this accomplishment, who are conspicuously incapable of even expressing themselves with common propriety.

Mr. R. I think that not difficult to be accounted for. Some few men have been born, with an overflowing

eloquence; but, in general, the accomplishment of expressing one's self with propriety must *be acquired*; and it can be acquired by any, who will take the needful pains. It may be observed, that artizans seldom find themselves at a loss in describing the different articles or processes, in which they are engaged. We may observe too in ourselves a fluency, when we converse on those subjects, which we have most frequently spoken of: as the reverse takes place, if we meddle with matters we are not much acquainted with. So that ease and propriety of expression, result from a combination of intimacy with a subject, and a capacity of dressing our thoughts in words, a capacity which is enlarged by practice, and an increasing familiarity with the necessary terms.

Mrs. R. This will admit, I think, of a familiar illustration. Our sex flourish with much ease and fluency, on the merits of their petticoats, book-muslin robes, and all the apparatus necessary to discover, under the name of concealment. Now would you not excuse me, if I should indulge a hearty laugh, at one of you attempting the same thing? Excuse a comparison from the nursery, it would be like a bear among children.

Mr. A. My dear madam, we can scarcely admit this to be a fair statement. Eloquence, you know, is generally supposed to be the natural inheritance of the fair sex.

Mr. S. I should be sorry to appear to detract, in the slightest measure, from female merit, and I trust I shall be acquitted of any such intention, when I state it as my opinion, that females are not *naturally* our superiors in this. The difference seems to arise from the different modes of treatment experienced by the boy and the girl. The former spends much of his play-time with his playmates, from whom he can learn little in this way: nor has he the advantage of much intercourse with his father, who is generally too much employed, to admit of it. At school his time is occupied with learning the ground-work of literature; and at college very little attention indeed is paid to the cultivation of a graceful

elocution. On the contrary, the girl is kept more at home, and is almost constantly with the mother; this naturally creates a familiarity between the child and the parent; and thus we may rationally account for the seeming earlier ripeness in the female. She has been more practised and more early drawn out in the exercise of expressing herself. This seems to me much more plausible, than the silly sneer in the comparison of "empty vessels making the greatest sound;" or the clumsy implication of a compliment to ourselves in the allusion to "loaded carriages moving the most slowly." The remarkable talkativeness of boys, who have been reared by females, is, I think, an additional proof. Mrs. Revel, I should conceive, must be a good judge in this question; to her I appeal.

Mrs. R. I was at first, sir, inclined to quarrel with you for attempting to rob us of what some of the ill-natured of your sex call our only qualification. But I am now decidedly of your opinion, and at the same time, thank you, in the name of the sex, for the handsome manner in which you have rescued us, from the odium, attached to our fancied superiority, by showing the emptiness of the imputed cause.

Dr. S. It seems then pretty well understood among us, that conversational excellence is *very* rare; that it is attainable, and that it is a very desirable attainment; in my mind, every parent, who studies the interest of his offspring, will commence their education on this point, from their tender years, and surely much of that time, spent by the parents in frivolous dissipation, and by the child in the contemptible acquirement of cutting capers, might be very profitably employed in cultivating the most endearing of all intimacies, that between the parent and the child; and then indeed how "delightful the task to rear the tender thought." How pleasing the capacity, if considered merely as an appendage to genteel education, of expressing one's ideas with ease and energy! But it is more than pleasing, it is useful, it is highly advantageous when we consider it as a mean of conciliating the favour of those whom we respect,

and to whom we look with hope of advantage: it is highly desirable especially for those, who, from their sphere of life look up to the acquisition of political power, or, with a truly patriotic heart, are anxious to acquire those fundamental principles, on which a manly, vigorous eloquence may be reared. Among many impious and absurd notions, Rousseau in his *Emilius* and *Sophia* has some just ones; among which he speaks much on the necessity of this very acquirement. The late Mr. Pitt, was much indebted for his fame, as an Orator, to this practice, I would so much recommend. His father conversed with him much, and familiarly; he obliged him to give a reason for every thing he advanced; sometimes argued with him, and thus formed him at an early age both to think, and to express those thoughts. Is it not rather a remarkable circumstance, that, even in the very seat of literature in this country, almost no effort should be made to cultivate that natural taste for eloquence, which we are generally allowed to possess. Yet so it is: if we except a few dronish discourses on oratory, delivered some years ago, and an occasional premium now for a better sort of school-boy theme, there is no exertion made.

Mr. R. I have often regretted this Dr. and have felt hurt, when, with all my partiality for my Alma Mater, I feel compelled to pronounce her nothing better than a mere school-mistress; and I have frequently been tempted to try, if it were possible to rouse her to some higher effort. Granting (which I do not) that her undergraduate course were excellent, why should not the graduates be more considered; but I forbear; this would perhaps lead us too far from the subject before us.

Dr. S. Little I think remains to be said, now on it, as we seem all pretty well agreed.

*Adjourned to the next week.*

*To the Editor of the Belfast Magazine.*

SIR,

HAVING met with the following description of the CITY OF LONDON, written by William Fitzstephen, a monk

of Canterbury, about the middle of the *twelfth century*, I have transcribed it for publication in your Magazine, with the hope that it may prove entertaining to many of your readers, who may not have had an opportunity of perusing the original, or any translation thereof.

The simplicity of the style seems peculiarly adapted to a description of the City of London, at the time in which our author wrote. To contrast the manners, customs, morals and even diversions of the inhabitants of the first city in the empire, under the government of Henry the second, and George the third, at periods so remote from each other, must prove highly interesting to the philosophic mind.

BECKET.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE MOST HONOURABLE CITY OF LONDON.

*The situation thereof.*

AMONGST the noble cities of the world, honoured by fame the city of London is the one principal seat of the kingdom of England, whose renown is spread abroad very far; but she transporteth her wares and commodities much farther, and advanceth her head so much the higher. Happy is she in the wholesomeness of the air, in the christian religion, her munition and strength, the nature of her situation, the honour of her citizens, the chastity of her matrons, very pleasant also in her sports and pastimes, and replenished with honourable personages. All which I think meet severally to consider.

*The Temperature of the Air.*

In this place, the calmness of the air doth mollifie men's minds, not corrupting them with inordinate conceptions, but preserving them from savage and rude behaviour, and seasoning their introductions with a more kind and free temper.

*Of Christian Religion there.*

There is in the church of St. Paul, a bishop's see, it was formerly a metropolitan, and as it is thought, shall recover the said dignity again, if the citizens shall repair each unto the island; except, perhaps the archiepiscopal title of St. Thomas the martyr, and his bodily presence, do perpetuate this honour to Canterbury, where now his reliques are. But seeing St.